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U.S. weapons may be sickening troops

Some soldiers say they feel effects of depleted uranium

By Deborah Hastings
Associated Press national writer

NEW YORK — It takes at least 10 minutes and a large glass of orange juice to wash down all the pills — morphine, methadone, a muscle relaxant, an antidepressant, a stool softener. Viagra for sexual dysfunction. Valium for his nerves.

Four hours later, Herbert Reed will swallow another 15 mg of morphine to cut the pain clenching every part of his body. He will do it twice more before the day is done.

Since he left a bombed-out train depot in Iraq, his gums bleed. There is more blood in his urine, and still more in his stool. Bright light hurts his eyes. A tumor has been removed from his thyroid.

Rashes erupt everywhere, itching so badly they seem to live inside his skin. Migraines cleave his skull. His joints ache, grating like door hinges in need of oil.

There is something massively wrong with Reed, though no one is sure what it is. He thinks, but cannot convince anyone caring for him, that the military's new favorite weapon has made him terrifyingly sick.

In the sprawling bureaucracy of the Department of Veterans Affairs, he has many caretakers. An internist, a neurologist, a pain-management specialist, a psychologist, an orthopedic surgeon and a dermatologist. He cannot function without his stupefying arsenal of medications, but they exact a high price.

"I'm just a zombie walking around," he says.

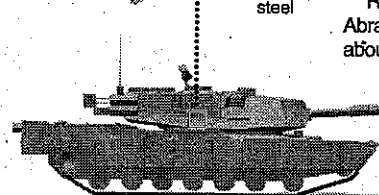
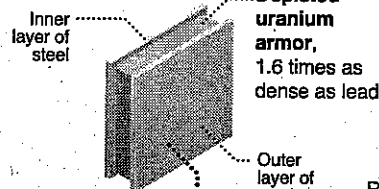
Reed believes depleted uranium has contaminated him. He now walks point in a vitriolic war over the Pentagon's arsenal of it — thousands of shells and hundreds of tanks coated with the metal that is radioactive, chemically toxic, and nearly twice as dense as lead.

A shell coated with depleted uranium pierces a tank like a

Radioactive weapons

An estimated 286 tons of depleted uranium munitions were fired by the U.S. in Iraq and Kuwait in 1991. An estimated 130 tons were used in the 2003 invasion. DU, a chemical toxin, is about 60 percent as radioactive as natural uranium.

In armor



SOURCES: U.S. Army; GlobalSecurity.org

"I'm just a zombie walking around."

HERBERT REED, a veteran of Iraq, on the effects of the medications he takes every day for pain

hot knife through butter. As tank armor, it repels artillery assaults. It also leaves behind a fine radioactive dust with a half-life of 4.5 billion years.

Depleted uranium is the garbage left from producing enriched uranium for nuclear weapons and energy plants. It is 60 percent as radioactive as natural uranium. The U.S. has an estimated 1.5 billion pounds of it, sitting in hazardous storage sites across the country. Meaning it is plentiful and cheap as well as highly effective.

Reed says he unknowingly breathed DU dust while living with his unit in Samawah, Iraq. He was med-evaced out in 2003 because of herniated spinal discs. Then began a strange series of symptoms he'd never experienced in his previously healthy life.

At Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., he ran into a buddy from his unit. And another and another. In the tedium of hospital life between doctor visits and

War workhorses that use radiated ammunition

M-1 ABRAMS TANK

Up to 120mm shell



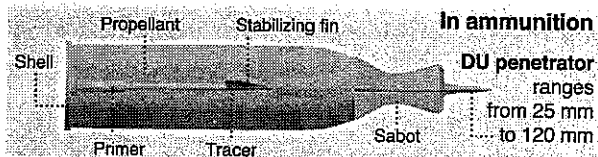
BRADLEY FIGHTING VEHICLE

30mm canon



A-10 WARTHOG

30mm canon



Rounds fired by Abrams tanks contain about 9 pounds of DU

Dart sharpens as it penetrates armor or structure

Sabot falls away

Tracer can track trajectory

Small bits of DU ignite, causing secondary explosions

Andy Fowle • AP

the dispensing of meds, they began to talk.

"We all had migraines. We all felt sick," Reed says. "The doctors said, 'It's all in your head.'"

Then the medic from their unit showed up. He, too, was suffering. That made eight sick soldiers from the 442nd Military Police, an Army National Guard unit of mostly cops and correctional officers from the New York area.

But the medic knew something the others didn't.

Dutch marines had taken over the abandoned train depot dubbed Camp Smitty, which was surrounded by tank skele-

tons, and unexploded ordnance. They'd brought radiation-detection devices. The readings were so hot, the Dutch set up camp in the middle of the desert rather than live in the station ruins.

"We got on the Internet," Reed said, "and we started researching depleted uranium."

Then they hired a lawyer.

The veterans have sued the U.S. Army, claiming officials knew the hazards of depleted uranium, but concealed the risks.

The Department of Defense says depleted uranium is powerful and safe, and not that worrisome.

March 6, 2007

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Members of the Veterans Committee:

I have been informed of the Veterans Committee Hearing for the passage of the Depleted Uranium Legislation scheduled for March 7, 2007 at 10:00 A.M.

As State Board President of the Wisconsin Viet Nam Veterans, Inc., I endorse passage of this legislation. Organization members also endorse this legislation.

Edward J. Andreas

**State Board President
Wisconsin Viet Nam Veterans, Inc.**

**(608) 897-2469
emandreas@tds.net**